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In late May and early June of 1967, the immediate sympathetic reaction of highly placed spokesmen in the United States Christian community to the State of Israel during the Middle East crisis was cited as an example of how far Christians and Jews had progressed toward mutual understanding; by late July, Christian reaction to the Arab-Israeli war and its immediate aftermath had become the measure of how far they still have to go. Interreligious dialogue has penetrated many barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding, but there are still wide differences between the basic assumptions and preoccupations of organized church groups and the Jewish community.

Anxiety and alarm were the spontaneous and virtually unanimous response of Jews in the United States -- and all over the world -- to a rapid succession of threats to the State of Israel: President Gamal Abdel Nasser's request for withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force from Sinai and Sharm El Sheikh on May 16, UN Secretary U Thant's consent on May 18, Nasser's announcement of a blockade of the Straits of Tiran on May 23, and his military agreement on May 30 with an erstwhile enemy, King Hussein of Jordan.

For whatever reasons and with whatever prior assurances or assumptions of support from other powers, President Nasser had deliberately set out to upset the very precarious balance of power in the Middle East and threatened whatever had passed for stability in the area. The Arab states, with a total population of some 100 million, were known to be heavily armed with the most modern equipment, supplied by both Communist and Western sources. Radio Cairo repeatedly broadcast threats of annihilation. Inflammatory tirades issued from Syria, Jordan, other Arab countries. The fate of Israel and its 2 1/2 million inhabitants hung in the balance, and the United Nations seemed powerless to deal with the emergency.

To Jews, the dangers and moral imperatives in this situation were self-evident and inescapable. Whatever their differences in theology, ideology or politics, whether they were Orthodox or secularist, Zionist or non-Zionist, left, right or anywhere between, Jews all over the world rallied to Israel's support in an unprecedented demonstration of unity. And Jews in America looked to their fellow citizens, including Christian leaders and church organizations, for forthright positions on Israel's right to exist as a sovereign state, her right to free passage through the international waters of the Gulf of Aqaba, and the obligation of the United States to honor its commitments to Israel -- preferably through the United Nations, and in concert with other major powers, if this were possible, but unilaterally if necessary.

The following pages offer a representative sampling and summary of Christian reactions to the 1967 Middle East crisis during the 10-week period from mid-May to the end of July.

The Threat of War

In the tense weeks before the outbreak of hostilities, when it appeared that Israel might become the victim of combined Arab aggression, a number of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christian leaders, as well as several Christian journals of opinion, took clear positions in support of Israel's national integrity and her navigation rights.

A joint statement, published all over the country on May 29, which called upon "our fellow Americans of all persuasions and groupings and on the Administration to support the independence, integrity and freedom of Israel," was signed by the Rev. John C. Bennett, President of Union Theological Seminary; the Rev. Robert McAfee Brown, Professor of Religion at Stanford University; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Dr. Franklin Littell, President of Iowa Wesleyan College; Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor emeritus of Theology at Union Theological Seminary; the Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, Dean of St. Vladimir's Russian Orthodox Seminary; Rev. John Sheerin, Editor of The Catholic World; and Bishop Stephen Gill Spotswood of Washington.

In the next few days, similarly forthright statements were issued separately by Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston; Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore; and Archbishop Paul J. Hallinan of Atlanta.

At a May 31 Washington, D.C. rally organized by the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, both Msgr. George C. Higgins, Director of the Social Action Department of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, a community civil-rights leader, declared their support for Israel's right of passage through the Gulf of Aqaba.

Although there were a number of open declarations of support from individual Christian leaders during this period, such public statements from Christian institutional bodies were noticeably rare. One of them was a telegram, sent on May 23 to President Johnson and Dean Rusk by Dr. William O'Brien, in his capacity as President of the Catholic Association for International Peace. He urged "every possible measure, both within and outside the UN, to discourage and prevent the threat or use of force by any state against the independence and territorial integrity of any other state in the Middle East," and endorsed the position that the Gulf of Aqaba is an international waterway.

In addition, religious leaders in several large communities issued joint statements of conscience: eight prominent Protestant and Roman Catholic spokesmen in Philadelphia on June 1; the Mid-Mississippi Valley Regional of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America, which represents 17 churches in Greater St. Louis, on May 30; seven St. Louis Protestant leaders of various denominations on June 6; the Catholic Interracial Council and the Commission on Church Unity of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese, and the Greater Cincinnati Interfaith Commission on the same day.

In general, Christian press comment on the May crisis concentrated on the political realities. Discussing the possibility of war in the Middle East, the non-denominational Protestant weekly, The Christian Century, said on May 31: ". . . It must not be assumed that Nasser is bluffing; certainly the Israeli government will not make such a naive assumption." A later editorial declared it "imperative" that the U.S. use its diplomatic influence to keep Israeli and Egyptian forces apart and the Gulf of Aqaba open, but warned that U.S. pressure should be applied only in cooperation with other major powers.

On June 3, the Jesuit weekly, America, favored a U.S. commitment "to support the territorial integrity of all nations of the area." Essentially, the editors backed Israel's position, but went on to remark on the rapid switch by some Jews from a "dove" position on Vietnam to a "hawk" position on Israel, and to chide one Jewish organization in particular for inconsistency.

The reluctance of the two powerful "umbrella" organizations -- the National Council of Churches and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops -- with whom Jews had been carrying on a continuous dialogue for some years, to commit themselves unequivocally on the basic question of Israel's survival, especially in the face of Arab threats to annihilate the whole population, came as a surprise to many Jewish leaders. Neither of these two groups issued any clear-cut statement to this effect during the saber-rattling days in May.

The Shooting War

From the beginning of the brief military action, most Christian comment was concentrated on appeals for a cease fire, concern for the fate and rights of new refugees and the status of Jerusalem. In a telegram to U Thant on June 5, Pope Paul VI declared himself "saddened and concerned" by the outbreak of war and expressed his hope that Jerusalem could be declared an open and inviolable city.

A telegram from the National Council of Churches to President Johnson on June 6 proposed that the U.S. Government "continue to make the utmost use of the UN; press for a cease fire; seek negotiation through the UN of all conflicting claims . . . to establish national and international rights in the Gulf of Aqaba, the right of Arab refugees and the recognition by all of the State of Israel." The World Council of Churches called attention to the "fate of refugees of various nationalities" in the fighting area and urged its member churches to press their governments to "bring about a cessation of hostilities and to lay the foundations of a just and durable peace."

On the same day, the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada called upon the two governments and the UN "to do everything humanly possible" toward a peace "that will recognize the essential needs of all nations involved."

And the World Alliance of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches, meeting in Geneva, asserted that "war has never solved political conflicts."

Archbishop Deardon, in his capacity as President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, asked on June 8 for a "crusade of prayer for peace" and expressed the "fervent hope" that the UN would be successful in halting the conflict.

The Pope's second appeal for peace in Jerusalem, on June 7, was broadcast in many languages by Vatican Radio.

However, a sharp and unambiguous "Declaration of Moral Principle," signed by Richard Cardinal Cushing and a number of other Catholic and Protestant religious leaders in the Boston area, supported Israel's position:

"None of us can be indifferent or uninvolved in confronting the moral issues inherent in the current conflict in the Middle East. We cannot stand by idly at the possibility of Israel's destruction, of decimating the two and a half million Jewish people. . . . We earnestly pray for a speedy cease fire. The end of hostilities, however, must be followed by a firm and permanent peace: one which will recognize Israel as a viable nation in the community of nations and which will include international guarantees of the territorial integrity of all nations in the Middle East. The peace must also guarantee the right of all nations without exception to free passage through the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba. . . .

". . . every effort must be made by the United Nations, with the cooperation of the major world powers, to confine the war and bring it to a speedy halt. Any failure of the UN to act promptly still places upon the United States and the other major powers this responsibility for peace."

At a June 8 Washington, D.C. rally for Israel called by major Jewish organizations, Father Edward Flannery, a specialist in Catholic-Jewish relations (and now the Executive Secretary of the Bishops' Subcommittee on Catholic-Jewish Relations), affirmed that "Israel's existence, as a legitimate member of the international community, must be preserved and guaranteed" and that the UN was the best-fitted instrument to achieve these ends. Dr. Edwin Espy, Associate General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, was never able to complete his speech at the rally, for the news of a cease fire set off an explosion of enthusiasm.

Occasionally, Christian spokesmen tended to view the Arab-Israeli conflict as a religious war, and to ignore the political realities in the Middle East. On June 9, The St. Louis Review, a diocesan weekly, gave the most extreme expression to this view:

"The most ominous aspect of the war in the Mideast is that it is a 'holy war' on both sides, a war by the Arabs and fellow Moslems to extinguish Israeli [sic] and war by the sons of Abraham against their God's enemies. A war for limited objectives, such as a strip of territory or free passage of a waterway, is limited in scope and negotiable without loss of face. But a holy war is an all-or-nothing war. Compromise with God's enemies is shameful and unpardonable. Negotiation between the principals in this war is therefore impossible. "

The editor added that the only hopeful note in the situation was that the war could not continue without supplies from the major powers.

After the cease fire on June 9 had reduced the threat of a global war, Christian spokesmen began to look more deeply into the causes of the conflict, both immediate and long-range. Who was the aggressor? What were the legitimate territorial claims of the Arabs and Israelis? The historical claims? How did Vietnam and the cold war affect Middle East affairs? How effective -- or ineffective -- is the United Nations? Where do we go from here? Opinions on these questions ran the entire gamut, from those which viewed the State of Israel as an intruder into the Arab world to those which saw Israel's claims as amply justified by history.

Most Catholic and Protestant comment assumed Israel's right to exist -- although some did not. But often this right was equated with the need to solve the Arab refugee problem and the internationalization of Jerusalem. And Israel's retaliation to Arab provocations -- Nasser's dismissal of the United Nations Emergency Force, the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba, as well as the threats to destroy Israel and its inhabitants -- was sometimes labeled "aggression" and "expansionism." A few statements seemed to express resentment of Israel's very presence in the Middle East, and especially of her military victory, which, it was argued, had created an anti-Western resentment that would severely hinder missionary programs in the Arab nations.

Thus, the Rev. James L. Kelso, a former moderator of the United Presbyterian Church, writing in Christianity Today of July 21, saw Israel as the sole culprit in the Middle East, and the Balfour Declaration as "the major cause of the three wars whereby the Jews have stolen so much of Palestine from the Arabs who have owned it for centuries." He called "this third Jewish war against the Arabs" perhaps the most serious setback to Christendom since the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

The Rev. Henry P. Van Dusen, a past president of the Union Theological Seminary, explained in a letter dated June 26 to The New York Times that Christian leaders had "silenced their judgment on Israel's assault on her Arab neighbors . . . partly lest they be misinterpreted as pro-Arab, which they most certainly are not, but primarily through profound disquiet over Israel's actions and ambitions. . . ." He went on to assert:

"All persons who seek to view the Middle East problem with honesty and objectivity stand aghast at Israel's onslaught, the most violent, ruthless (and successful) aggression since Hitler's blitzkrieg across Western Europe in the summer of 1940, aiming not at victory but at annihilation -- the very objective proclaimed by Nasser and his allies which had drawn support to Israel."

This letter elicited a sharp rejoinder from one of Dr. Van Dusen's former students, the Rev. A. Roy Eckhardt, Chairman of the Department of Religion at Lehigh University, who protested that the parallel of Nazis with Israelis was an "unspeakable distortion of the facts." Such a parallel, he declared, was:

"... to call black white, to label as 'aggressors' the targets of aggression, and to identify as 'annihilationists' those who barely escaped being annihilated by a foe pledged to turning them into corpses, and who, after their own victory, now manifest an almost incredible restraint and readiness to deal righteously with their would-be slayers."

In addition, Dr. Eckhardt wondered whether:

"... perhaps the only eventuality that would mutually satisfy Communist, Arab and Christian detractors of Jews for the latter's 'aggression' would be for Jews to consent to lie down and be slaughtered. At least this would fulfill one side of the traditional yearning of Christendom. . . ."

The noted Biblical scholar, Dr. Frederick C. Grant, declared that "no nation has a historical claim to the land of Israel that can even be compared with that of modern Israel." In the June 18 issue of The Witness, an independent Episcopal weekly, he denied that the land "has always belonged to the Arabs," countering that "there have always been Jews in Palestine -- ever since there were Jews anywhere."

Most Christian spokesmen, however, took no stand in support of either side, but their emphasis on certain issues revealed the problems church groups were primarily worried about. The internationalization of Jerusalem soon became an overriding concern of the Holy See and the goal of a vigorous campaign by the Vatican among all the United Nations member delegations. Protestant groups seemed less preoccupied with the internationalization of Jerusalem but they, like the Catholics, stressed free access to the holy places. And both groups immediately initiated relief programs for the Arab refugees.

On July 7, the Executive Committee of the General Board of the National Council of Churches adopted an extensive resolution which had been prepared by a task force of 40, including experts on international affairs, the Middle East overseas missions and Christian social action. The Council declared that it could not "condone by silence" Israel's territorial expansion by armed forces or approve her annexation of the Jordanian portions of Jerusalem. But it also

said that recognition of Israel by the entire international community was "indispensable to peace," and called for early talks between the belligerents. Among the other necessary steps toward peace, the Council included increased effort to solve the refugee problem, for which Israel, the Arab states and other nations share the responsibility; full scale economic development; and free access by all nations to the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal. The resolution suggested the establishment of a research institute where the best minds in the Middle East could try to solve their problems in a continuing dialogue.

The Internationalization of Jerusalem

As previously noted, Pope Paul VI had urged that Jerusalem remain an open, inviolable city during the shooting war. Shortly afterwards, an article in L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican daily, argued that the Israelis' military victory had in no way reduced the importance of placing Jerusalem under international control. This was widely publicized in the world press and broadcast repeatedly, in several languages, over Vatican Radio. On June 14, Msgr. Alberto Giovannetti, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, circulated a note on "Jerusalem and the Holy Places" to all 122 member delegations. Internationalization of "that city and its vicinity," the memorandum declared, was "the only solution" which offered sufficient protection of Jerusalem and the holy places.

The Vatican appeal found some echo in the American Catholic press. The Criterion (Indianapolis) said on June 23 that "Jerusalem does not belong to the Israelis or to the Jordanians. It belongs to the world. . . . Logically, the city should be completely neutralized, declared an international city under the unshakable guardianship of an international body. The obvious [body] . . . is the United Nations."

The Pilot (Boston), which on June 24 had found Israel's offer to place the holy places under international supervision "reassuring," on July 8 turned to favoring UN administration. But "for the rest," the editors went on, "Arab intransigence must give way to a more realistic posture and accept the fact of Israel and its continued peaceful existence as a state in the Middle East."

In the same issue, Cardinal Cushing urged that Jerusalem be above politics. "Nothing less than a truly international enclave can satisfy the conscience of the world in regard to the sacred shrines and their environment."

But American Catholic opinion was not unanimously for internationalization. On July 20, The Georgia Bulletin, a diocesan weekly, argued that "those who are now so concerned about free access [to the holy places] have been silent for 19 years." The call to internationalize Jerusalem was "not only 19 years too late, it ignore[d] the history of the Jews."

The Religious News Service reported on July 18 that Rabbi Hayim Donin

of Southfield, Michigan had publicly questioned the rationale behind Vatican pressure on this issue: Since Israel had already offered to internationalize the holy places, why was the Church "so much more upset by the thought of Israel's control of Jerusalem than of Jordanian control?" He suggested that the Vatican was still following the theological teaching that the defeat of the Jews by the Romans and the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E. were divine punishment for the Jews' stubborn refusal to accept Christianity -- an idea that ought to be laid to rest "as a dangerous myth."

RNS reported on the same day that Archbishop Iakovos, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, had also called for internationalization of Jerusalem. A week later, on June 26, the Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, of which Archbishop Iakovos is chairman, called unanimously for an "internationally guaranteed status" to shrines of all faiths, without specifically urging the internationalization of the city. (The Standing Conference represents 11 Orthodox Churches, with a total constituency of 6,000,000 persons.)

On the other hand, The New York Times reported on June 19 that world church leaders had "reacted coolly" to the proposal for international control. Times correspondents found a general consensus among Protestant and Orthodox leaders that it was "inappropriate for religious groups to back a specific plan." Most of them agreed with the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, who, speaking from the Council's Geneva headquarters, declared on June 20 that the status of Jerusalem and its holy places was primarily a political matter and that religious questions "could only be raised once there is a political agreement." (Not surprisingly, Coptic Christian leaders in the United Arab Republic had protested Israel's occupation of the Old City. In a cablegram on June 19 to the World Council, they passed over this organization's repudiation of the notion of collective Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus, and pressed for a stand against the occupation of Jerusalem and the holy places by "the very people who crucified Christ and deny his resurrection." They requested a denunciation of the "Anglo-American aggression" which hid behind Israel's "attack on Arab lands.")

Archbishop Ieronymous, the new Archbishop of Athens and leader of the Greek Orthodox Church in Greece, welcomed "any solution which would absolutely insure a peaceful atmosphere" around the holy places and "their removal from national antagonisms." Archbishop Athenagoras, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Istanbul, took a similar position.

The Rev. Constantine Koser, newly elected Brazilian Minister General of the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor, which oversees Christian shrines in the Holy Land, also made it clear at a news conference in Rome that he would be satisfied with adequate Israeli guarantees of access for all faiths.

And, again according to The New York Times, an Anglican representative in London said that his church had no official opinion on internationalization.

Later, however, Anglican Archbishop Frederick Donald Coggan of York, addressing the House of Lords on his return from a visit to the U.S. and Canada, proposed the internationalization of a large area of land, including Jerusalem and perhaps Bethlehem. According to an RNS dispatch dated July 3, he said that peace in the Middle East, and perhaps the whole world, might depend on the Israeli victors' magnanimity toward the defeated nations.

The National Council of Churches resolution of July 7, cited earlier, urged an "international presence in Jerusalem, to preserve the peace and integrity of the city, foster the welfare of its inhabitants and protect its holy shrines with full rights of access to all."

On July 12, The Christian Century, recalling Jesus' lament over the Holy City, said that "bitterness and quarrels over Jerusalem remain; agony also remains." Asserting that Jordan was wrong in refusing to recognize Israel, and in confiscating areas of Jerusalem established as international zones and prohibiting Jews from worshipping and praying at the Wailing Wall, the Century nevertheless contended that annexation by Israel would pile wrong on wrong. While the editors viewed an internationalized Jerusalem as preferable to one united by Israeli force, they proposed a third solution:

"[it] would be even better if Israel and Jordan devised a system by which a united city could be mutually administered and other nations were excluded from all control of Jerusalem. Such a system would require Jordan to enter into diplomatic relations with Israel and would open the door to further cooperation between two states . . . that have overlapping interests. . . . We understand Israel's unwillingness to surrender any of the Arab lands it has captured until the Arab states acknowledge Israel's existence, its legitimacy and its integrity as a state. We agree that some of the borders . . . should be readjusted to give Israel the security it has not had during the past score years. But we also believe that Israel's unilateral annexation of Old Jerusalem plants depth charges that will be exploding for the next hundred years."

A group of 16 distinguished Christian seminary presidents and professors declared their support for unification of Jerusalem under Israeli rule in a New York Times advertisement on July 12. "For Christians, to acknowledge the necessity of Judaism is to acknowledge that Judaism presupposes inextricable ties with the land of Israel and the city of David, without which Judaism cannot be truly itself," they stated. They pointed out that the artificial division of Jerusalem, which for 20 years had "resulted in a denial of access to their holy places for all Jews and for Israeli Arabs of the Moslem faith," and limited access to Christian shrines by Israeli Christians as well, "did not elicit significant protests on the part of the religious leaders of the world." They continued:

"We see no justification in proposals which seek once again to destroy the unity which has been restored to Jerusalem. This unity is the

natural condition of the Holy City, and now once again assures the world's religious peoples the freedom of worship at the shrines. ...

"... the sanctity and protection of the holy places of all denominations have been assured by the Government of Israel, whose record over the last twenty years ... inspires confidence that the interests of all religions will be faithfully honored. This confidence is further strengthened by Israel's offer to place the holy places under independent denominational supervision."

The signatories noted that a new opportunity had arisen to come to grips with the Arab refugee problem and urged that Israel and the Arab countries take initiatives "to eliminate once and for all this human suffering, [in] ... an overall settlement ... through direct negotiations."

Dr. Howard Schomer, an official in the National Council of Churches Department of Overseas Ministries, made his rejoinder in a letter to the 16 signatories of this statement, which was released publicly on July 17. Arguing that only internationalization of the whole city could satisfy both Jewish and Moslem historical and emotional ties to the shrines, he expressed the dilemma that confronted most Christian institutional bodies:

"We are keenly aware that the precious Jewish-Christian dialogue is in some jeopardy at this time and requires of Christians special sensitivity and courage. But we are also aware that the Orthodox and Protestant Christians of the Middle East are subject to all of the painful pressures that grip the general Arab population, plus the peculiar dangers inherent in their minority status. We are determined to keep faith with both our fellow Christians in the Middle East and our Jewish brethren there and here."

Christian Relief to War Victims

Both Protestants and Catholics made immediate appeals for humanitarian assistance to victims of the Middle East war, and allocated funds for relief and welfare.

On June 12, Paul VI sent \$50,000 for aid to war victims and announced an airlift shipment of food and medical supplies to Amman, Jordan. The World Council of Churches appealed to its member churches, including those in Eastern Europe, for an initial \$2,000,000, and several denominational groups pledged support. The Council announced that it was maintaining liaison with the Roman Catholic International Caritas, which had made a similar plea. In New York, church specialists on Middle East affairs, appearing on a CBS-TV special program, agreed that American Christians had a special responsibility to work for peace in the region through refugee assistance and support of government development-aid programs.

While these appeals were largely non-partisan, and the funds intended to alleviate "distress of peoples of all nationalities and religions," it was apparent that the bulk of relief was for displaced Arabs.*

It is difficult to assess the effect of this concern for Arab refugees on the stands taken by individual Christian leaders or representative organizations on the issues in the Israeli-Arab conflict. But in at least two cases, sympathy for the plight of Arabs appeared to determine a political judgment. Both were personal statements by leaders of Protestant denominations, but both were widely distributed to pastors and leaders within these denominations.

The Rev. Dana E. Klotzle, Director of the United Nations office of the Unitarian-Universalist Association, condemned "unequivocally the apparent expansionist policy of the present Israeli government, which cannot help but lead to more violence and bloodshed in the area." He also accused Israel of excessive nationalism and of a naked power policy. Dr. Klotzle condemned "with equal vigor the policy of the Arab leaders to incite their people to violence against Israel." He recommended the internationalization of the new and old parts of Jerusalem, as well as the establishment of a homeland area for the Palestinian Arabs which would include some of the territory set aside by the 1947 UN Partition Plan. Until 1967, this land was in both Jordan and Israel. And he called upon "both Jew and Arab alike to rise above the narrow confines of nationalism. . . ."

Dr. Alford Carleton, Executive Vice-President of the United Church of Christ Board for Homeland Ministries, emphasized the misery and bitterness of the Arabs in the Middle East, the need for relief services, and his personal sense of frustration over "the old tragic drama of war. . . ." In an open letter to pastors and leaders of his church, he discussed the sources of Arab resentment of the West:

"In the long, long run, of course, they are right that their present plight is the responsibility of the British and the Americans in the sense that the original decision to create in Palestine a national home for the Jews -- not to mention a full-blown and aggressive national State of Israel -- was an act of Western political and economic invasion into the area which had been indisputably 'the Arab World' for well over a thousand years. If in their frustration and bitter disappointment they now turn angrily against us, we should not be surprised!"

Dr. R. Park Johnson, Acting Secretary for the Middle East of the Commission on Ecumenical Missions and Relations of the United Presbyterian

* The plight of Jews in Arab nations, thousands of whom were imprisoned or otherwise persecuted during the same period, while less widely known, was a matter of public record. However, it received little attention in Christian circles.

Church in the U.S.A., called on June 30 for an understanding of "the deep passions on both sides" and warned that Christians should not identify too closely with Zionist groups if they were concerned about an Arab-Israeli reconciliation. He said he had prepared his statement for the information of Commission members rather than for adoption, but warned that "the willingness of many American Christians [to lend their avowed or implicit support to pro-Israel statements or public meetings] has not gone unrecognized by the Arab people. It has contributed to the sense of frustration and . . . anti-American emotions of many Arabs, both Moslems and Christians, both political leaders and common people."

Direct Negotiations

Church organizations and leaders issued many statements expressing their humanitarian concern for the plight of Arab refugees, and some said that Arab recognition of the State of Israel was really contingent upon a settlement of this problem. Only a few public statements, however, dealt specifically with Israel's long-standing demand for face-to-face talks with her Arab neighbors.

The Protestant Council of the City of New York on July 15 called for "direct negotiations . . . based upon the legal existence of Israel and the desire by both parties to establish a permanent peace." In addition, the Council recommended immediate steps toward exchange of prisoners, aid to displaced persons, a Middle East common market and a halt to the provision of arms to governments in the area.

On June 23, RNS reported that Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, Chairman of the World Council of Churches Central and Executive Committees, and President of the Lutheran Church in America, had declared for direct negotiations. Interviewed in Canada, he said it would be a mistake for Israel to annex conquered territories without negotiation, but also urged that the Arab states recognize Israel's national sovereignty to help bring about a general peace settlement. Internationalization of Jerusalem was an ideal, but utopian, solution, he declared, and he doubted that either side would agree to it.

Although the National Council of Churches' July 7 "Resolution on the Crisis in the Middle East" was critical of Israel's "territorial expansion by armed force," it did take an unambiguous position in favor of direct negotiations:

"Indispensable to peace in the Middle East is acceptance by the entire international community of the State of Israel. . . . Early talks between the belligerents with or without the good offices, conciliation or mediation of a third party are encouraged."

In a June 30 statement signed by President Carroll L. Shuster and General Secretary Forrest C. Weir, and mailed to 2,800 people in the Los Angeles area, the Council of Churches in Southern California called upon "Israel and the Arab Nations to meet at the conference table" as a step toward

permanent peace, "unrestricted access and protection" of the holy places and efforts by religious, governmental and welfare institutions to alleviate the plight of displaced persons in the Middle East.

The Los Angeles Times of July 29 published the full text of a "Statement of Religious Conscience" signed by some 150 Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish clergymen in the Southwest. In one of the few declarations that gave first priority to "the right of Israel and the Jewish people to exist in a sovereign state," the signatories listed the requirements for a "permanent and just settlement" of Middle East problems. Warning against "the world catastrophe of renewed conflict," they stressed the importance of "peaceful settlement of territorial disputes and other matters of common concern through direct negotiation between interested nations."

There were some declarations by clergymen and editorials in the Christian press that discussed the question of direct negotiations, as well as other problems raised by the conflict, in moral terms. On June 16, The Providence Visitor, Roman Catholic diocesan weekly for Rhode Island, took a stand on Israel's side:

"As a universal moral issue, the evidence is overwhelming that the initiation of hostilities was engendered by the United Arab Republic. ...

"The problems . . . which lie ahead pose difficulties almost as vexatious as the war itself. . . . Little empathy is needed to imagine the prevailing Jewish state of mind. To return to the original lines of demarcation could easily be regarded as a waiting period for the U. A. R. to build up another military machine. "

And later:

"Israel's swift victory over the aggression initiated by the forces of the U. A. R. has been circumscribed by a morass of delays and double-talk. Arab provocation was beyond question; military resolution on the part of Israel was rapid, comprehensive, and most unusual in military history, compassionate. In fact, the humanitarian attention lavished upon the defeated . . . is seemingly without historical parallel. Why then, are such subtle pockets of opposition at work? One wonders why attempts at stabilizing the situation in the Middle East appear to be tinged with a certain regret over the outcome. ...

"What is truly appalling is the absence of moral declaration on the part of responsible powers in the West . . . which has never been noted for conspicuous reticence in branding aggressors in the past. The present silence is difficult to comprehend. In view of . . . the history of our century, it could be construed as somewhat frightening."

The Commonweal, a liberal lay-Catholic weekly, said on June 16: "Whatever short-term policies Washington might adopt to avert disaster, ultimately it must be fully committed to Israel's survival." And on June 23 the editors hoped also "that after the first flush of victory, the voices of moderation [would be] heeded in Israel." And, they concluded:

"On the one hand, international pressure and a decent regard for the opinion of mankind will urge Israel against clinging to every inch of territory it has conquered. On the other hand, after months and years of threatening Israel with extermination, the Arab nations can hardly expect that Israel will give up the margin of safety it has now purchased by force of arms, unless this concession is accompanied by a realistic peace treaty and credible guarantees of Israel's security."

The Jesuit journal, America, said on June 17 that "the problem beyond the problem" was the cold war: The purpose of the Soviet Union was to exploit tensions and create complications for the United States while we are deeply involved in Southeast Asia. On June 24, the magazine enumerated the lessons of the Middle East conflict: First, that "the UN is still far from realizing its purpose as a world peace keeping organization;" and second, that "negotiation in place of war is easier talked about than achieved."

"The price for ultimate peace in the Middle East," the magazine declared, would "come high -- perhaps prohibitively high in the thinking of each of the parties. But the price must be paid." Right or wrong, each side would have to reckon with the feelings and point of view of the other as fact: Israel must recognize the Arab view that the refugees are "people who have unjustly lost their homeland"; and the Arab world must recognize that Israel is a "homeland for Jews who have no other."

The Arab-Israeli War and Christian-Jewish Dialogue

Before war broke out in the Middle East, numerous public statements by eminent Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox leaders, as well as the extraordinary support for Israel's position registered in public opinion polls, encouraged an expectation of general Christian backing: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, considered them to be "a reflection of Jewish-Christian support that has developed in the years since Vatican Council II."

But it soon became apparent that, despite these individual statements, Christian groups were hesitating to make official commitments concerning issues that Jews -- and indeed most Americans, according to a Gallup poll -- considered basic in the Middle East crisis. Their silence on the threat to Israel's survival, and especially the later declarations by several Christian leaders that the recognition of Israel's sovereignty was contingent upon the solution of other problems, aroused the resentment of many Jewish spokesmen.

Accusations and counter-accusations, aired both privately and in public, soon exposed a thorny issue that will have to be faced in future Christian-Jewish dialogue.

Rabbi Balfour Brickner, Director of the Commission of Interfaith Activities of American Reform Judaism, speaking before the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Los Angeles on June 22, said that the "organized church seemed unable to take a strong stand on what it considered to be a political issue." But, he added, "the survival of the Jewish people is not a political issue." He charged that the church "by its silence, by peaceful calls for peace, suggesting that the matter be placed in the lap of a then particularly paralyzed United Nations -- also failed the cause of world peace." And, finally, he said that the American Jewish Committee's early estimate of Christian support was "an exaggerated oversimplification."

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, in his June 14 column for The National Catholic Reporter, similarly called attention to the silence of both the Protestant and Catholic "formal establishments."

As reported by RNS on June 27, Rabbi Pesach Z. Levovitz, President of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, declared that official Christian reaction to the crisis testified to the "essential inadequacy" of the dialogue. Because the ecumenical movement had not awakened "the ethical conscience and spiritual foundations of the Christian community in rising to the overwhelming peril to Israel's very survival," he called on Jewish leaders and organizations to "reassess and review the value of their participation" in dialogue programs.

These charges did not go unanswered. On June 30, Msgr. George Higgins, a widely syndicated columnist in the American Catholic press, took Rabbis Brickner and Hertzberg to task for "arguing from the premise that the Israeli-Arab war was a religious, not to say a 'holy' war." Himself a strong supporter of Israel, he felt that most American Catholics were pro-Israel too, "but on their own terms." And he countercharged that Jewish pressure for statements of support was a form of "ecumenical blackmail."

Rabbi Hertzberg replied that "no Jew, and certainly not I, ever said that Israel's battle was a 'holy' war. . . . On the contrary, it was the Arab side which was using such rhetoric. . . ." He agreed that "Jews have been pushing their Christian colleagues very hard," but asked whether it was "terribly immoral to ask the major Christian communions to join with us" in speaking out for the right of Israel to survive.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, speaking at the annual meeting of the Religious Newswriters Association on July 7, also criticized "the failure of the 'diplomatic' institutions of Christendom to speak an unequivocal word in defense of the preservation of the Jewish people." Discussion had been confined, in the past, to problems in the diaspora, but "no future Jewish-Christian dialogue

will take place without Jews insisting upon the confrontation on the part of Christians of the profound historical, religious, cultural and liturgical meaning of the land of Israel and of Jerusalem to the Jewish people," he said.

The Christian Century entered the discussion on July 12. The long editorial cited above devoted some space to the arguments of Rabbis Brickner and Levovitz. While pleading with Christians "to remember the temper of the times and to understand the mood of a people who believe -- and who were encouraged by the Arabs to believe -- that they are once more threatened by genocide," the editors declared that "Christians will certainly postpone decision about Israel's territorial integrity until the Israelis and the Arabs have both had their say. They will not sign a blank check." Taking particular issue with Rabbi Levovitz, the Century stated: "If interfaith dialogue must cease until all Christians become Zionists, then, of course, there will be no dialogue. . . . This is the time to increase and deepen the Jewish-Christian dialogue, not to suspend it."

The July 1-15 issue of the Methodist publication, Concern, explained that the "few Fall leaves" in "this Indian summer of general good will" between Christians and Jews in America were partially due to "the widespread lack of understanding on the part of Christians of the solidarity of the Jewish people. Jews tend to think of themselves as Jews in a way [that] most Christians do not think of themselves as Christians." Whatever the divisions within the Jewish community over political Zionism, the magazine continued, the recent crisis produced renewed Jewish unity. "In the same crisis, however, a unity of view did not occur between Christians and Jews, even between those who had co-operated in social action ventures frequently in the past."

The magazine went on to explain why Jews were so disappointed in public statements by the National Council of Churches, which discouraged unilateral action and urged "impartial judgment" by the UN at the time of the greatest threat to Israel. Given the obvious weakness of the UN at that time, "Jewish leaders believed that such statements . . . were little more than abandonment of the Jews to their own resources." The editors concluded:

"The time has come for both Christians and Jews to recognize that on certain issues each operates from his own set of presuppositions, which are not necessarily shared by the other. . . . While Christians may not be able to participate existentially in the community that is Judaism, they must be able to understand what that community means to Jews. And Jews must be able to understand that Christians are never going to allow genocide of the Jews to mar human history again, even though they may not see eye to eye on Middle Eastern issues. We cannot become Jews, but we must insist on the freedom of Jews to live fully, including so to live in Israel, a recognized national state.

"Peace is far from secure in the Middle East. Until it is, Christians and Jews must work together in the United States to effect it, without a deep sense of injury arising from their honest differences."

Conclusion

Perhaps the basic point at issue between the organized Jewish and Christian communities was whether support of Israel's survival -- the survival of the population as well as the juridical state -- constituted a clear-cut moral commitment. Jews certainly saw it that way, and viewed such a commitment as the starting point for any discussion of political solutions or problems arising from the war. It was the unwillingness of most church organizations to declare themselves on this key question which aroused the resentment of Jewish spokesmen. Jews did not expect unanimous Christian support for every policy decision of the State of Israel. What they did expect was an outpouring of protest at the threats to annihilate human beings -- the Jews of Israel -- and an affirmation of the right to defend themselves and their nation. The relative silence of the churches on this matter, combined with later remonstrances regarding Israel's "territorial expansion," was inexplicable to Jews, particularly when it seemed clear that the overwhelming majority of Americans supported Israel's position. (A July Harris poll indicated that 82% of the American people believed that Israel's existence as a sovereign state should be formally accepted by the Arab states; 88% believed Israel should be guaranteed passage through the Gulf of Aqaba; 86% felt Israel should have passage through the Suez Canal and 79% opposed UN condemnation of Israel as the aggressor in the war, with 62% rejecting Israel's withdrawal from occupied territory as a precondition to negotiations.) Christian spokesmen, on their part, seemed perplexed by the intensity of the Jewish response.

Several factors help to explain the unwillingness of Christian groups to take an unequivocal stand on either side in the Arab-Israeli conflict. First, they apparently evaluated Arab threats to annihilate the Israeli population as rodomontade and propaganda, whereas the Jews, in whose memory the European holocaust is still painfully vivid, took them very seriously indeed -- especially since the Arabs' enormous supply of Soviet armor provided the means to carry out these threats. Second, the incredibly swift and decisive victory of the Israeli forces placed the Arab nations in the underdog position. (In several communities, Christian representatives who were scheduled to appear at emergency rallies for Israel withdrew after the military victory.) Third, Christian church groups have strong ties and responsibilities in the Middle East -- institutional, educational and philanthropic -- and constituencies in many Arab nations. And some Christian leaders felt that an open pro-Israel declaration would jeopardize not only their institutional interests, but their hopes to play a conciliatory role. For example, Roland Huff, Director of Promotion for the Disciples of Christ Week of Compassion relief offering, warned ministers not to take sides because, ". . . before all the facts are assessed, hasty alignments can be detrimental."

But, as many observers have noted, disagreement between Christians and Jews on specific solutions to the Middle East problem is not the heart of the matter. Certainly most Christians, as well as Jews, favor a guarantee of Israel's survival; and most Jews, as well as Christians, want to relieve the

suffering of displaced Arabs and to assure free access to the holy shrines. But because the two communities look at the crisis from different viewpoints, they see these problems in different orders of priority. The question that divides them is where to break into the vicious cycle that has bound the Middle East in continuous tension for 20 years. Many Christian leaders believe that settlement of the refugee problem, the status of Jerusalem and the strengthening of the United Nations are the primary objectives, and that recognition of Israel's sovereignty is contingent upon, or secondary to, these goals. Most Jews feel that there can be no lasting solution to Middle East problems before the Arab nations come to terms with Israel's existence, and they contend that Israel cannot, or should not, relinquish the conquered territories without some assurance from the Arab states and the international community that there will be no recurrence of the conditions that led up to the war.

The gap between these two positions may not be very wide, but it does not appear to be narrowing. Moreover, it has been deepened by a new awareness of the basically different approaches of the Christian and Jewish communities to some crucial problems. It was something of a shock to both Christian and Jewish participants in the interreligious dialogue to discover that perhaps they did not take the same things for granted. As spokesmen of both groups have noted, the dialogue had not prepared Christians for the Jews' passionate demonstration of peoplehood and attachment to Israel. And that sudden demonstration has directed attention to some of the unexplored theological issues that influence, directly or indirectly, political attitudes toward the State of Israel.

We do not here refer to statements in which the theological content was open and explicit -- statements which, in fact, viewed the Arab-Israeli war as fulfillment of prophecy. Such utterances were rare: (An example was a statement by a Protestant minister, Dr. Harold Sala, broadcast on station KBBI, June 14: "What has just taken place is consistent with what the Bible says will occur in the end of time preceding the second coming of Christ.") The overwhelming majority of comments by church spokesmen dealt with the conflict as a secular phenomenon, and a few specifically disavowed Biblical connotations. (Dr. R. Park Johnson, whose statement was cited earlier, declared: "Present political and military events in the Middle East cannot be properly interpreted as a realization of the prophetic messages in the Bible about the people of Israel as an instrument of God's purposes of justice and mercy for all nations under the rule of God.")

Jews had the growing impression, however, that Israel was being judged by Christian groups somewhat differently from the way any other nation-state confronted by similar circumstances would be judged, and some concluded that an unexplored theological terrain underlay some of the discussion, no matter how secular the terminology. They noted, for example, that some of the same Christian groups who are sympathetic to the nationalism of the emerging African and Asian states are less kindly disposed to Jewish nationalism. Similarly, many who argue for an understanding of the positive implications of black nationalism in America are discomfited by manifestations of Jewish

peoplehood. The significance of this persistent sense of peoplehood has yet to be fully explored in the deepening dialogue between Christians and Jews, but it is clear that some Christians regard it as a kind of religious atavism, a tribalistic regression from the universalism of Jewish religious thought at its purest. According to this view, the "mission of Israel" is to be a witnessing people throughout the world, and to tie this mission to a piece of land is to degrade it. Whether or not such a viewpoint is seen by Jews as a "Christian" reading of Jewish history, it is obvious that theological considerations, ranging from eschatology to the demythologizing of religion, are at work here.

No doubt the interfaith dialogue will survive the tensions created by the Middle East crisis. But if it is to reach beyond surface differences to the underlying essentials separating religious groups today, clearly the ideas and feelings of Jews and Christians about Israel, both the land and the people -- with all the religious, emotional and political connotations this word carries for both traditions -- will be on the dialogue agenda for some time to come.

SUGGESTED READING*

American Reactions to the Six-Day War: A Commentary Report, including "Israel and the Intellectuals," by Robert Alter; "Israel and American Jewry," by Arthur Hertzberg; "In the Light of Israel's Victory," by Milton Himmelfarb; "The American Left and Israel," by Martin Peretz. 1967. 32 pp. \$1.00.

The Arab Refugee Problem and the United Nations. George E. Gruen. 1967. 12 pp. 20¢.

"The Arabs of Palestine." Martha Gellhorn. Reprinted from The Atlantic. October 1961. 24 pp. 10¢.

Children of One Father. A selected annotated bibliography of pamphlets and reprints on Jewish-Christian relations. 1966. 28 pp. 25¢.

Crisis in the Middle East. Questions and answers on the issues underlying the outbreak of hostilities in June. 1967. 12 pp. 20¢.

A Guide to Interreligious Dialogue. Ground rules for interfaith discussions and selected discussion topics. 1966. 24 pp. 50¢.

"Israel: Land of Unlimited Impossibilities." Barbara Tuchman. Reprinted from The Saturday Evening Post. 1967. 6 pp. 10¢.

The Many Faces of Anti-Semitism. Religious, economic, social, political, psychological origins of a classic prejudice. 1967. 64 pp. 75¢.

"Mideast's Refugees: Victims or a Hope?" Martha Gellhorn. Reprinted from The Los Angeles Times. August 1967. 6 pp. 10¢.

"New Helpmate for New Nations." Albert Maisel. Israel's technical assistance programs for the new African nations. Reprinted from Reader's Digest. November 1961. 4 pp. 10¢.

The Situation of Jewish Communities in Arab Countries. Mimeo. 1967. 5 pp. Single copy free.

* The materials above are all available from the American Jewish Committee. A Publications Catalogue, listing more than 200 titles distributed by the American Jewish Committee, is available on request.